

The Feast of the Holy Trinity with the Rite of Confirmation for Leland Gardner,
Reagan Gefaller, Adeline Ulmer, and Audrey Wueller
12 June, Anno Domini 2022
St. John 3:1-17

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior
Jesus Christ.

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

It would certainly be easy to go on and on about these four young Christians who have spent the last few years being instructed more deeply in the Christian faith. But to do so would be to turn everything they have studied on its head. We are certainly here to rejoice but not in anything they have done or accomplished. We are all here this day to rejoice in the wondrous work of God in them and for them. Indeed the depth of riches and wisdom and knowledge of God that He has redeemed them and us and revealed to us His Name and His salvation! That is our great joy at all times. That is the source and cause of all our boasting all our hope and all our peace. This is the Lord's doing and it is marvelous in our eyes. The Holy Spirit has these young Christians faith and caused that faith to grow and strengthen and matures. St. Paul said "No one can say 'Jesus is Lord' except by the Holy Spirit." (1 Cor. 10:13) It is our God and Lord who has opened their lips that they might make a public confession of their faith in the mystery of the blessed and Holy Trinity and the salvation which He has worked for them. All praise and glory to His Name!

These are four bright young Christians to be sure. They have applied themselves diligently to all that has been asked of them and they have been a joy to engage in theological discussion. They have asked interesting questions and shared some pretty profound insights. Now they have been instructed in the chief articles of the Christian faith and made known their own desire to receive Christ's Holy Body and Blood. But cannot claim any credit for standing up here today as though they figured out all mysteries of the faith. Today we celebrate what God in His great mercy has revealed to them and worked in them as they have heard His Word and by that Word been brought to confess with Isaiah "I am a man of unclean lips! But my Savior Jesus Christ has died for me and made atonement for me. He has washed me in Holy Baptism and made me clean! In the most profound of mysteries, my Lord bids me to eat of His Body and drink of His Blood which He shed on the cross for me. All praise and glory be to Jesus! Amen! My hope of salvation rests alone on His Blood and His Word. He is my confidence and my

greatest treasure and no devil or death or world will ever take His love away from me.”

Leland, Reagan, Adeline, and Audrey, you wear those white robes as a reminder that you are baptized and that there in the font you were washed, you were justified, you were sanctified, you were born again not by the will of man but by the will of God Himself. On that day you were washed clean of all your sins by water and the Spirit. Almighty God made clear His desire to have YOU as His dear children. Simply being born of Christian parents is not enough. They are but sinful flesh who can only give birth to more sinful flesh. Jesus said clearly to Nicodemus, who thought Jesus was crazy, “You must be born again because that which is born of the flesh is flesh.” You needed to be born again, from above, by the Holy Spirit. And because the Lord desired your salvation, He blessed you with Christian parents and grandparents who made sure to give you the gift of Baptism. Though they are but flesh and blood, they too have been born again through Baptism and were moved by faith in Christ’s promises to bring you to receive the same gift.

And in faith they have also continued to nourish the faith and life given through Baptism. Led by the Spirit, they have brought you week after week to your heavenly Father’s house, despising the pleasures and riches of this world so that you might receive the 1 thing needful - the Word of God which forgives your sins, raises you from death, and leads you into all truth. They speak daily of Christ and His great mercy and goodness in order to drown out the poisonous lies of Satan who would lead you away from Christ down the broad and easy path that leads to destruction. They sought to be models to you of Christian piety and virtue. You certainly have even more cause than the rest of us this day to sing praise to God and bless His Holy Name for making sure that you received these precious gifts. He has graciously given you His Holy Spirit so that you might stare into the mysteries of the faith and humbly bow your head with the angels crying out “Holy, holy, holy, Lord God of Sabaoth! Heaven and earth are full of Thy glory!” He has worked this faith in you and He will preserve you in it the same way - through your continued hearing and learning of His Word. It is this word alone that is able to keep you in the faith and the truth and bring you to everlasting salvation.

But, take heed. Apart from this life-giving Word and the divinely appointed Means of Grace which bear this Word, neither you nor anyone can live. The bright flame of faith lit at your Baptism as the Holy Spirit descended upon you can be snuffed out. If you turn your heart from God and set it on the things of this world, if you believe that you are now an expert in the faith and have no more need to

hear and learn, to confess and be absolved, to study and to pray; if you turn aside from the commandments and walk in the way of self-indulgence you will die because you will have, like Esau, willfully traded the gifts of Christ for a meager and worthless bowl of stew. I pray that if you have learned anything, it is that in Christ and only in Christ, you are full you and have every good thing. But that apart from Him you are have nothing. May God grant that your faith always burn brightly and your zealouslyness for truth and righteousness surpass our own. Be always on guard because the devil wants nothing more than to steal you from Christ and enslave you again to sin and death.

You will make promises today that I have encouraged each of you to consider carefully and take seriously because your Lord takes them seriously. Our Lord says “Whoever confesses me before men, I will confess before My Father who is in heaven. But whoever denies before men, I will also deny before My Father who is in heaven.” It is a great and joyous thing in heaven when you publicly confess the Name of Christ! But terrible judgment awaits those who turn from this confession and deny their gracious Savior who laid down His life for them. You will be asked to reaffirm that you renounce the devil and all of his works and all of his ways, all of which the Lord has made clear to you through His Word. You will be asked to confess again the faith of the Christian Church in the Triune God as confessed in the Apostles’ Creed. You will be asked to affirm that what you have been taught these past few years is, in fact, THE one true Christian faith revealed in Holy Scripture. Consequently, you will also be asked whether you intend to cling to this faith and confession and no other because there is no other, suffering even death rather than falling away from it because falling away from it IS death. You will be asked if it is your intention to regularly and faithfully hear the Word of God and receive the Holy Supper according to the command and promise of Christ. You will be asked whether it is your intention to conduct your whole life according the Word of God as it is alone the light of truth in this world of darkness and sin. These are serious promises that you know you do not have the power to faithfully keep without the help of God. And you know that you will be tempted on every side. You will see and read and hear things that challenge and even mock what you confess. You will have friends and even family who will try to lead you away from Christ and encourage you to do things that are contrary to God’s clear Word. Your own flesh will constantly resist and war against the Holy Spirit. You will be tempted to skip praying or coming to church or reading the Bible because there are other more fun or enjoyable option available to you. But, be vigilant. Stand Firm. This who remain faithful to the end will receive the crown of life. And be assured of this, because the intentions you have expressed this day please

your heavenly Father, you have His promise that He will give you His grace to help you be faithful even unto death.

Likewise, all of us gathered here today who have been baptized, catechized, and confirmed do well to listen to these vows of fidelity and recall that we have made the same vows with our own lips. We have been shown the kingdom of God! We have been born again! We have tasted the great goodness and mercy of God. We know Christ and all that He has done for us! Yet, we have all foolishly turned aside from what God has told us and we once joyfully confessed. We have failed and fallen far short of the glory of God, allowing ourselves to be distracted from the Means of Grace, failing to daily hear the Word of God and pray, allowing our hearts to chase after all manner of false gods. “Forgive us Lord, to Christ we flee, Who pleads for us endlessly!” (LSB 581) Our Father’s faithfulness to His word means that He will forgive all of His children who return in humility and repentance. “If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just and will forgive our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness.” (1 John 1:9) That is why we are here - because Christ is the fount and source of forgiveness and delivers that forgiveness to us through His Word and the precious sacraments. It is because we believe Christ that we gather together around the gifts He has given. Though we have wandered, our heavenly Father is always eager to forgive His children when they return in repentance.

Dear confirmands, the faith that you confess this day is not new to you. You have been confessing it since the day of your baptism, when your sponsors confessed it on your behalf because you didn’t not yet have the words. Ever since that day, you have been learning those words, words which God Himself gives us in the Bible so that we sinners can know and speak about Him correctly and, most importantly, be saved. The articles of faith, the creeds that we confess, are not from man. They are divinely revealed truths that one generation gives to the next. Catechesis is really just giving you God’s language - words like Trinity, justification, and absolution. You have believed these things, you have grown to have a deeper understanding of these things, and now you have made that faith publicly known before God and His Church. You are being confirmed today in the truly catholic, that is, universal Christian faith held by all of God’s people since Adam. You join the prophets and apostles, the martyrs and evangelists, the confessors and the mighty army of saints without number who have made this good confession and even laid down their lives for it because it is divine and eternal truth and it is salvation. How blessed you are! And how blessed is the Name of our God who has hidden the mysteries of His kingdom from the wise and learned and revealed

them instead to all of us little children, who simply confess the word of our heavenly Father as truth, though its great depth is beyond our comprehension.

The world will always scoff at the things of God because the things of God are dumb to them - God dying for sinners, baptizing that washes away the guilt of sin, bread and wine that bear with them the very Body and Blood of Jesus and the forgiveness of His death. They will always consider us who believe such things to be foolish babes and infants who understand nothing. You will suffer persecution for what you confess. You will be accused of all manner of evil. You will be hated by many and villified. Do not be afraid. Christ calls all who are persecuted for righteousness' sake blessed and promises that the kingdom of heaven belongs to them. These are the same sufferings that Christ Himself endured and now He sits at the right hand of God. All who endure in this faith until the end will look in triumph on all those who mocked them. We will take our place in the kingdom which Christ has prepared for us through His cross. He has begun the good work of salvation in you and He will most certainly bring it to completion on the Last Day, though it is through great tribulation. Your faith is not in vain and you will look in triumph upon all who hate Christ. It is precisely from the mouth of such foolish babes and infants as us that the Lord has established strength in order to show that the world's wisdom is complete and utter foolishness that leads to death. We will claim nothing of our own for what is ours is nothing but sin. We will claim everything of Christ's because it is life and truth and salvation. We will hear His Word, embrace His cross, rejoice in our Baptism, and make haste to receive the Holy Supper that He gives. We will glory in His Name and bow before His throne, not as servants but as dear and beloved children who have received every good and perfect gift from our Heavenly Father and His Son and the Holy Spirit.

May this one true and only God - Father, Son, and Holy Spirit - guard and keep each of you and all of His baptized children in the one true faith until the day when He returns on the clouds to gather us from the four corners of the earth and deliver us into His eternal kingdom. "Blessed are You, O Lord, who beholds the deep, and who dwells between the cherubim. Blessed are You, O Lord, in the firmament of heaven, and greatly to be praised forever." Blessed are You, O Lord, who has brought forth the joyous confession of these four precious lambs and robed them in the righteousness and holiness of Christ.

In the Name of +Jesus.

(We stand.) The peace of God which passes all understanding keeps your hearts and your minds through faith in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Pastor Ulmer